

The Fruits of Monotheism

Week 1: November 5, 2018

Background; Monolatry

Reading:

Overview Timeline [<http://ruml.com/thehebrewbible/timelines/overview.html>]

This timeline is the single most useful way I know to get a good understanding of the grand sweep of the history of Israel. (Hover your cursor over each era). An excellent way to learn this information is to try to fill out this blank timeline [pdf] with dates and events; repeat until satisfied! [Here's a static version of the timeline for printing [pdf].] The timeline relies on the bible itself for events so you should appreciate that there is no extra-biblical confirmation of *anything* before 850 BCE (were David and Solomon, to say nothing of Abraham, historical individuals?). As we'll concentrate on the Exile and the following periods, be certain to know those names and dates. You might find it instructive to add to the timeline some major events in ancient Greece, e.g., Pericles, Socrates, Aristotle.

Basic Ideas Timeline [<http://ruml.com/thehebrewbible/timelines/ideasBasic.html>]

Read the text which appears when you hover over a rectangle. This is an overview of the major ideas during the biblical period. For a more detailed accounting, see [the advanced ideas timeline](#). [Here's a pdf version of the timeline.]

Genesis chapters 1-3 [pdf]

The two creation stories were written centuries apart. Can you tell *exactly* where the first one ends and the second begins? Which was written first? How would you convince someone that they're not just two versions of the same story (what are the indisputable inconsistencies)? How would you characterize the presentation of God in each? Why is this relevant to our course? (If you'd like to spend 40 minutes in a Harvard classroom, go to <http://ruml.com/thehebrewbible>, pull down "Listen to a lecture with notes" and select lecture 4.)

Exodus 20:2: "Thou shalt have no other gods before Me"

Exodus 15:11: "Who is like unto thee, O Lord, among the gods?"

Psalms 86:8: "Among the gods there is none like unto thee, O Lord"

Is the author a monotheist? See also Deuteronomy 6:14-15: "Do not follow other gods, the gods of the peoples around you; for Yahweh your God, who is among you, is a jealous God and His anger will burn against you, and He will destroy you from the face of the land."

1 Kings 18. [pdf]

We're in the ninth century in the Northern Kingdom (Israel) after the ten tribes had split off from the Southern Kingdom (Judah). The king of Israel is Ahab who has for political reasons married Jezebel, the daughter of a neighboring king but she is also a priestess of the Caananite god Baal. Ahab built a temple to Baal and Jezebel imported a number of prophets of Baal to serve there. There has been a drought and the prophet Elijah is on the scene. Was

the author of this “battle of the gods” story a monotheist? When your god loses, what’s your fate?

Robert Goldenberg, *The Origins of Judaism* (2007), pp. 26-67. [[pdf](#)]

This fundamental reading covers the transition from monolatry to monotheism at a depth which is just right for us. It also focuses on the deemphasis of prophecy and its replacement by attention to a newly-redacted collection of old and new textual materials containing the commandments of YHWH as transmitted through Moses, the Torah.

Morton Smith, *Palestinian Parties and Politics That Shaped the Old Testament* (1971), pp. 1-14. [[pdf](#)]

Columbia professor Morton Smith (1915-1991) was one of the great biblical scholars of the twentieth century. This first chapter of one of his most influential books describes in no uncertain terms the character of the biblical text as we have it. This is not common knowledge so I urge you to press on through it ignoring the details. Just go for the big picture and the useful summary of past biblical scholarship.